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SUBJECT: HMG EXPECTS LITTLE IMMINENT CHANGE IN CUBA BUT
REMAINS ENGAGED

LONDON 00001157 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: PolCouns Richard Mills, Jr., reason 1.4, b/d.

11. (C/NF) Summary. Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials told Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry they detected little real change since Raul Castro assumed power, but they firmly believed the only means of exploiting any possible openings with the regime was to remain engaged. They were wary of "lecturing" the regime, which seemed to make Cuban officials dig in their heels, but were attempting to discern what the EU could get (e.g. release of political prisoners) in exchange for lifting the suspended 2003 Restrictive Measures at its June meeting on the Cuba Common Policy. They could not envision supporting a lifting of the measures without getting something in return because to do so would send the wrong signal. In another meeting, a local academic at the International Institute for the Study of Cuba told McCarry the U.S. should swallow its pride and let the regime think it has won, at least briefly, because Havana will not be swayed by the types of pressure historically employed. End Summary.

FCO: Constructive Engagement Over Isolation

12. (C/NF) HMG agrees that there has been little real change in Cuba since Fidel Castro began handing the reigns of power to his brother Raul, but London remains hopeful that small changes instigated by Raul will provide openings for constructive engagement. FCO Director for the Americas Chris Wood told Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry and EUR's Nicole Otallah April 15 that the press was overly optimistic about change when Fidel fell ill and later resigned. HMG agreed that most of the changes proposed by Raul primarily benefit Cuba's "nomenklatura." Wood noted that in a recent meeting with Cuban Vice Minister Caballero, FCO Minister Meg Munn told the Cuban that HMG would like to engage Havana but needs a signal from the regime to do so, particularly on human rights. Caballero was adamant that lecturing Cuba would not foment change; he cited the removal of Cuba from the Human Rights Council agenda as a positive step that allowed the regime to sign the UN Covenant on Human Rights.

13. (C/NF) In the meantime, HMG was thinking about what it could get out of the regime before June when the EU discusses the EU Common Policy on Cuba and whether to lift the suspended 2003 Restrictive Measures. Wood said HMG continued to believe the 2003 Measures did not accomplish anything but is reluctant to lift them without getting something in exchange, e.g. release of political prisoners. Although the UK embassy in Havana has fairly good access to the regime, such conversations were difficult because the

regime does not admit to having political prisoners. In addition, the regime wants something in exchange for signing the UN Covenant on Human Rights, which is meaningless without implementation. McCarry noted that regime thugs had beat up Cubans who were distributing copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights two days after the Cubans signed the Covenant, sending a strong signal to the Cuban people. Matthew Forbes, FCO Head of the Caribbean Team said the regime is already in breach of the Covenant because it refuses to take back from the UK former Cuban prisoners; but HMG cannot press these issues without a dialogue with the regime.

¶4. (C/NF) McCarry said the USG supported the UK and others having a dialogue with the regime to press issues of human rights and the need for democratic change, but the USG also emphasized the importance, at this time, of EU outreach to the opposition and Cuban civil society. McCarry emphasized that it is essential the regime begin to give up some of the control it has over every aspect of Cubans' lives by ending the practice of jailing people for disagreeing with their government. He pressed HMG to include something in the U.S.-EU Summit Communique that calls for "democracy, human rights, and the release of political prisoners in Cuba." Otallah pressed for UK support of the Political Prisoner Initiative with the EU. HMG was very supportive of the initiative but was concerned that the timing of it could complicate the discussion of the Common Policy in June; it should be sometime later.

¶5. (C/NF) Asked about the transition fund for Cuba, McCarry noted the USG was still working on the details of the fund. He added that the USG, including DoD, is also making contingency plans for a transition in Cuba to deal with humanitarian and infrastructure issues, refugees, democracy assistance, etc., in the event of a transition to democracy. McCarry noted these plans were close-hold because cynics would easily jump to the conclusion that the U.S. was

LONDON 00001157 002.2 OF 002

planning for regime change, which was certainly not the case.

Academia: Call Their Bluff

¶6. (U) In a separate meeting, Assistant Director of the International Institute for the Study of Cuba Dr. Stephen Wilkenson shared his insights from his many visits to the island. He argued that the regime is impervious to the kinds of pressure heretofore applied by "the West." Stephenson asserted that the desire for "consumption is unrestrainable," with Cubans increasingly wanting and expecting electronics and modern conveniences. This consumerism would propel change in the regime if the West "swallowed its pride" and let Havana think it had won. He believed the regime would accept "social democracy" if it were assured that health care remained universal.

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